

Michaels Cuebids & Unusual Notrump Overcalls

Why?

After an opponent opens, it's often difficult to describe a hand with two long suits. The auction may get too high (or end too soon) for you to show both, or you may not have the strength to safely bid **either** suit. Consider these problems if RHO opens:

- (A) RHO opens 1C or 1D and you hold: ♠KQ964 ♥KQ872 ♦52 ♣7
(B) RHO opens 1H or 1S and you hold: ♠765 ♥Void ♦K10765 ♣QJ1093
(C) RHO opens 1C or 1S and you hold: ♠4 ♥KJ872 ♦AJ10754 ♣5

With (A), you would overcall 1S and hope to bid hearts later. With (B) and (C), it may be dangerous to bid at all, especially at the 2-level. Both hands have good playing strength, but neither can be described with a standard overcall, which tends to show a one-suited hand with more high-card points.

The **Michaels Cuebid** and **Unusual Notrump** are conventions that let you show two suits with one bid. The convention you use depends on which suit the opponent opens and which suits you have. They are generally played together, as the concepts behind them are similar.

Cuebid - General

A **cue bid** (also, **cuebid** or **cue-bid**, pronounced *queue-bid*) is a term that applies to two types of bid:

- A bid of a suit that has already been bid by opponents.
- A slam-investigating bid made during an auction's later rounds that shows control of a suit. This is a traditional use of the term, but in the early 21st century the usage appears to be giving way to *control bid*.

After the opponents have bid a suit, a cue bid of that suit is normally intended as a forcing bid. It shows interest in contesting the contract and asks partner to describe his hand.

Michaels Cuebid

This is a direct cuebid of the opponent's opened suit (1C by RHO, 2C by you) to show 5+-card length in two other suits. One of your suits is always a major, but the exact two you promise depend on the opening bid:

- Over a **minor-suit opening**, a Michaels Cuebid (1C-2C or 1D-2D) shows **both majors**.
- Over a **major-suit opening**, a Michaels Cuebid (1H-2H or 1S-2S) shows **the OTHER major and an unspecified minor**.

Unusual 2NT

This convention is a direct jump to 2NT over an opponent's opening bid to show the **two lowest-ranking unbid suits**. You should have at least 5 cards in each suit for this bid. The exact suit you promise depend on the opening bid:

- Over a **1C** opening, 2NT shows **diamonds and hearts**.
- Over a **1D** opening, 2NT shows **clubs and hearts**.
- Over a **1H** or **1S** opening, 2NT shows **both minors**.

In the example hands above, Hand (A) is perfect for a Michaels Cuebid. With (B), an Unusual 2NT shows both suits without promising great high-card strength. And with (C), your overcall depends on which suit the opponent opened -- over 1S, you would bid 2S Michaels to show the other major and a minor; over 1C, you would use the Unusual 2NT to show the two lower unbid suits.

Strength requirements

Michaels Cuebids and Unusual Notrump overcalls are usually preemptive in nature - they show good suits and distributional values, but don't necessarily promise the high-card strength of a regular overcall (the right 7HCP is enough). They can, however, be used with stronger hands where you want to force partner to choose one of your suits. Over an opponent's 1D opener, for example, you can bid 2D Michaels with ♠AKQ98 ♥KQJ92 ♦K5 ♣7, and then jump to game in the major partner bids.

Finding partner's unknown suit

The one case where you won't know partner's exact two suits is when he makes a Michaels Cuebid over a 1H or 1S opening (showing the other major and an unspecified minor). Since you know his major, you can bid it if you have 3+-card (or 2-card)

support. If you can't support his major but have at least 3-card length in *both* minors, you'll want to play in his minor suit. To ask partner which minor he holds -- and tell him that's your preferred trump suit -- bid **2NT**. Partner will bid his long minor and you can then pass, raise or sacrifice.

ADVANCED STUFF

When Not To?

In general, though, the best rule is to just use your judgment. Decide if you want to emphasize one suit (usually a major) with a simple overcall, or if you want to bring two suits into the picture immediately with a Michaels Cuebid or Unusual Notrump. For example:

- Over a 1D opener, it's probably best to overcall 1H with ♠8 ♥AQ976 ♦53 ♣KQ1043. You could use the Unusual 2NT, but this would force partner to bid at the 3-level, which may be too high.
- If there's great disparity in the strength of your two suits, it may be better to overcall one of them instead. Over 1H by RHO, if you have ♠KQJ98 ♥A ♦J10654 ♣43, a 1S overcall is a better description than a Michaels Cuebid.

Be careful if your high-card strength is outside your suits. With a hand like ♠K ♥A6 ♦J9853 ♣Q7632, your suits are too weak for a 2NT overcall.

Vulnerability should also affect your decision. Since partner is often forced to bid at the 3-level (sometimes with only 2-card support), a *vulnerable* Michaels or Unusual 2NT should promise more playing strength-- ♠AQJ97 ♥KQ1082 ♦42 ♣4 or ♠Void ♥KQ1084 ♦65 ♣A98732.

Responding bids

Remember that partner's Michaels Cuebid or 2NT overcall is artificial. If your RHO passes, you *cannot* pass. For all Unusual 2NT overcalls and most Michaels Cuebids, you'll know the exact two suits partner holds, so bid your longer one. You should almost always bid one of partner's suits; *don't* be tempted to suggest any other suit as trumps unless you have *great* length and strength in it.

The *level* of your bid depends on your strength and trump support. With a weak-to-intermediate hand, bid at the lowest level available. With a stronger hand, you can jump in one of partner's suits to invite game or jump directly to game.

If RHO makes an intervening bid, you should compete if you have some strength and support for one of partner's suits. Partner is promising 5-5 in his suits, so any 3-card holding is good support.

If you're not vulnerable and you have a weak hand with strong support, you may want to sacrifice. Suppose LHO opens 1H, partner overcalls 2H (spades and a minor), and you hold ♠J964 ♥5 ♦A872 ♣J874. You know the opponents can make at least 4H, so if you're not vulnerable, you should sacrifice right away by jumping to 4S. With your long trumps and singleton (and filler in whatever partner's minor is), a spade contract should make at least 8 or 9 (and maybe 10) tricks.

Other uses

These conventions are most commonly used in direct seat over an opponent's opening bid, but can apply in other types of auctions, too. If an opening bid is passed around to you, you can balance with a Michaels Cuebid or Unusual 2NT. For example, after 1C by LHO-Pass-Pass, **2C** by you would be Michaels, showing both majors. After 1H-Pass-Pass, a bid of **2NT** is Unusual, showing both minors.

You can also play that any "unusual" notrump overcall (even if it's not a jump) is the Unusual Notrump. For example, after 1H by LHO-Pass-2H, **2NT** by you shows both minors (similarly, 1H-Pass-2H-3H is Michaels, showing spades and a minor).

Notrump overcalls at higher levels also convey this meaning: 1D by LHO-Pass-3D-3NT by you shows clubs and hearts. 1S-Pass-4S-4NT shows both minors. The higher the level, the stronger and more distributional your hand should be for your bid.